Capable

CLIMATE POLICY ACCEPTABILITY ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

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Report on public perceptions of actors and policymaking

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1 Introduction

The goal of the present report is to examine perceptions people hold of different societal actors (e.g. other citizens, governments, companies/industries) and of public participation in climate policy-making. We link the examined perceptions to climate policy acceptance outcomes and aim to produce actionable insights into how these perceptions could be targeted in order to increase the social feasibility of climate policies. In the current version of the report, the analyses are based on two pilot datasets, one collected in October/November 2023 in a representative sample in the Netherlands (n=700) and the other in April 2024 in a convenience sample across all EU countries (n=500). Once the full data collection of the first wave in WP2 is complete, the report will be updated with insights from bigger samples from a wider range of EU countries. We present our main insights across three sections, each focusing on a different level of perceptions.

In the first section, we examine whether there is a discrepancy between people's actual climate attitudes (i.e. personal biospheric values, climate worry, and climate policy support) and their perception of other citizens' attitudes. In turn, we then investigate whether their perceptions of other citizens' climate attitudes affect the degree to which they personally support climate policies and engage in pro-environmental behaviours. We find evidence of pluralistic ignorance (i.e. people underestimating other citizens' climate values and attitudes), but the perceptions of others' biospheric values do not predict climate policy support.

In the second section, we study how people perceive different social actors like governments, companies, and other citizens with regards to their responsibility for taking climate action, the likelihood they will engage in those actions, and the effectiveness of their action for addressing climate change in case they do engage in a substantial amount of it. We particularly look at whether there are discrepancies in terms of actors' responsibility for taking action/being able to take effective action and the expectancy of them actually doing so. Furthermore, we examine how the actors' perceived willingness to take action relates to the support for policies that target their behaviour. We find that certain actors are perceived as being relatively less willing to take climate action as compared to their perceived responsibility for doing so and the efficacy their actions could have. The degree of climate action a given actor is perceived to be likely to take in turn predicts support for policies either restricting that actor's actions or helping push along their climate action.

In the third section, we finally look at public participation in national climate policy making. We examine whether there is a public perception deficit—i.e. whether people desire to participate in climate policy making more than they perceive the current political system to allow them to. In turn, we look at how this desire to participate relates to their trust in the national government, support for climate policies, and the impacts they expect those policies to have on their personal financial situation and well-being. We find evidence of a public participation deficit, closing which by increasing public involvement in climate policy-making builds trust in the national parliament and leads to increased support for national climate policy.

We conclude the report with a summary of some main conclusions and policy recommendations that arise from the insights produced.

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2 Methodology

The present version of the report is based on two pilot survey datasets. Note that this report will be subsequently updated with insights from bigger samples from a wider range of EU countries after the full data collection in WP2 is complete. The first data (used in sections 3 and 4) was collected in October/November 2023 by RUG and ETH on a representative sample of 700 Dutch citizens using the online panel provided by Panel Inzicht. The second data (used in section 5) was collected in April 2024 by RUG on a convenience sample of 500 EU citizens using the online panel provider Prolific. All of the variables in both datasets were collected using self-reports on 7-point scales.

3 Others citizens' climate beliefs and climate policy acceptability

3.1 Pluralistic ignorance

In the present section, we examine how people's actual climate attitudes match up to their expectations of other citizens' attitudes. We expect to observe pluralistic ignorance: people across the board expecting others' to care and worry less about climate than themselves. The data aligns with this expectation and showcases pluralistic ignorance across a range of climate attitudes. Specifically, we find people estimate that other citizens:

- hold less strong biospheric values ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.05$) than they do themselves ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.09$); $t(486) = 19.825$, $p < .001$;
- prioritise biospheric values ($M = -0.59$, $SD = 0.82$) less than they do themselves ($M = 0.58$, $SD = 0.92$); $t(486) = 21.581$, $p < .001$;
- worry less about climate change ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.72$) than they do themselves ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.18$); $t(486) = 16.919$, $p < .001$;
- have lower general support for climate policy ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.19$) than they themselves ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.41$); $t(486) = 16.745$, $p < .001$;
- support the EU-ETS ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.32$) less than themselves ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.56$); $t(485) = 7.658$, $p < .001$.

3.2 The effects of second-order beliefs on policy acceptance

Given the degree of misperceptions about others' beliefs observed above, we then examine whether people's estimates of others' values affect their acceptance of climate policies—i.e. whether people support climate policies less or more when they think other citizens value the natural environment and its protection less or more. We find that people's beliefs about other citizens' biospheric values do not seem to affect their general climate policy support ($\beta = -0.08$, $p < .165$; see the left figure below) nor the amount of pro-environmental behaviour they engage in personally ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = .181$; see the right figure below).

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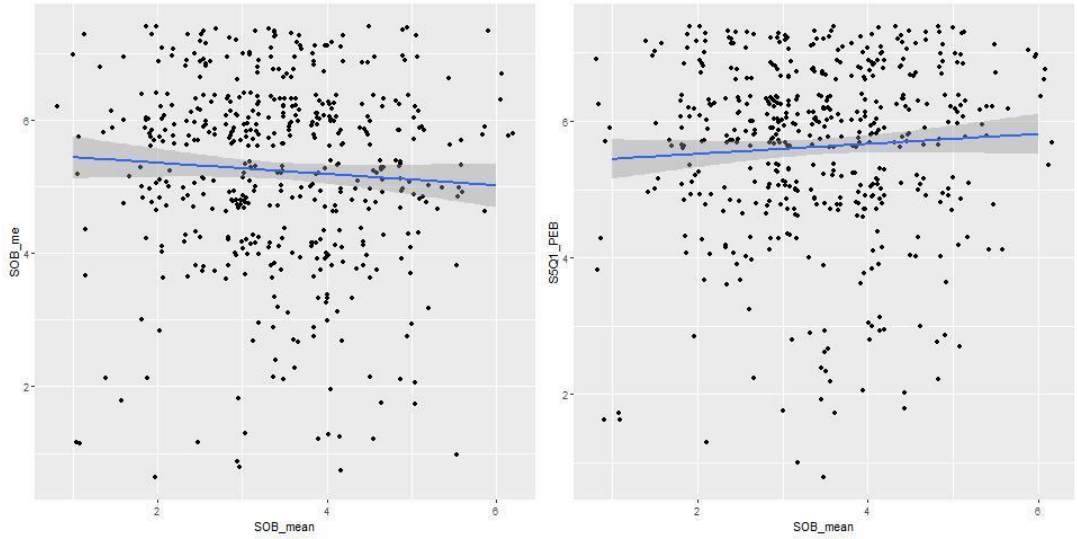
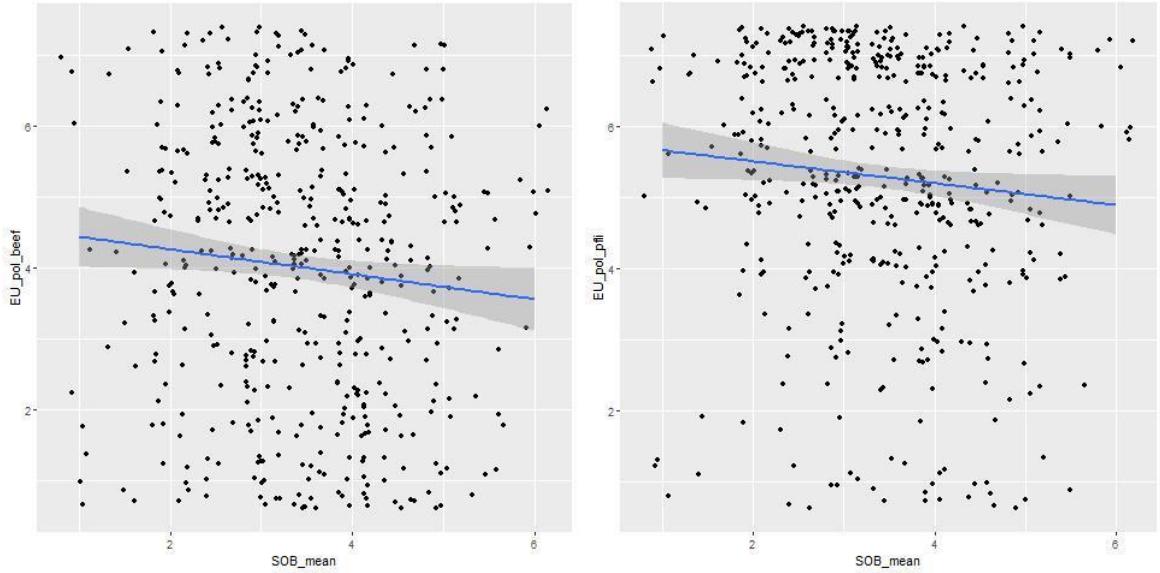
Figure 1. Correlation between perceived biospheric values of other citizens and a) general climate policy support (left) / b) degree of pro-environmental behaviour (right).



However, while beliefs about other citizens' values do not seem to play a role in people's general climate policy support, they do affect the extent to which people support certain specific EU-level policies affecting the behaviour of others. Specifically, the less people think others' value environmental protection, the more they endorse policies restricting the behaviour of individuals like a ban on intensive cattle farming ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < .05$; see the left figure below) and a ban on private flights departing from the EU ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < .05$; see the right figure below). This seems to suggest that people believing others are unlikely to do their part in sustainable transition, they support policies restricting the actions of others so as to make sure they behave pro-environmentally regardless of personal inclinations.

Figure 2. Correlation between perceived biospheric values of other citizens and a) support for an intensive cattle farming ban (left) / b) support for a ban on private flights departing from the EU (right).



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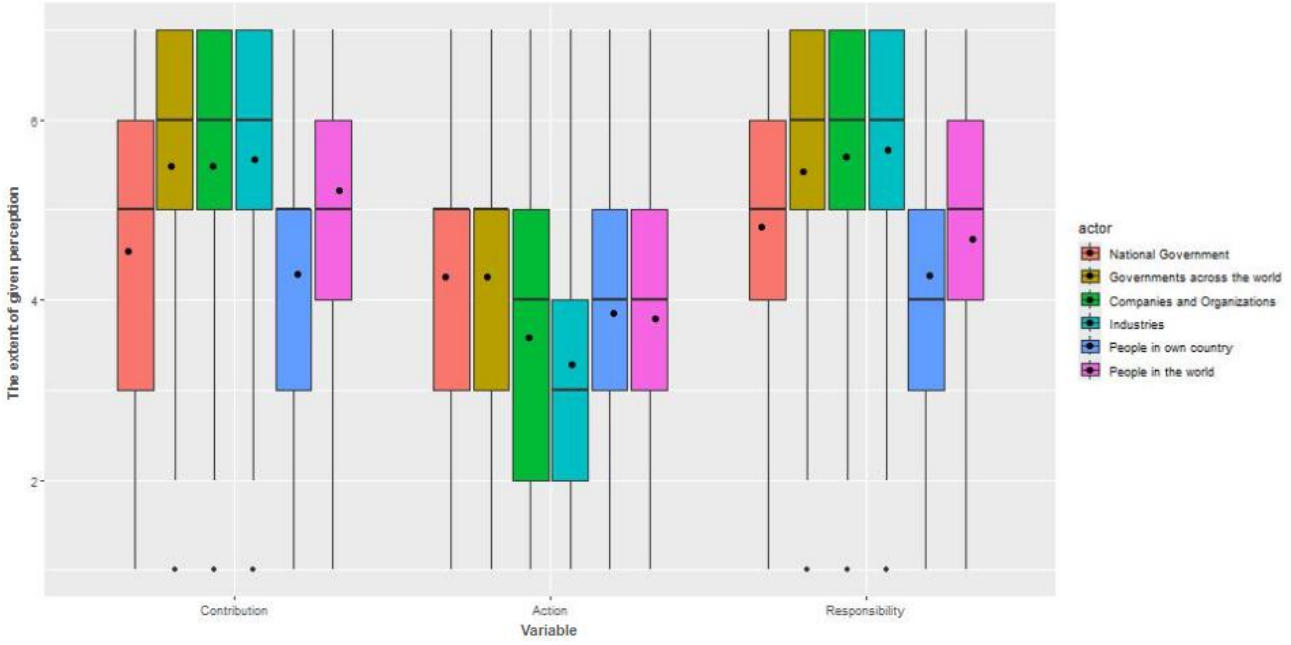
4 Perceptions of different societal actors and climate policy acceptability

4.1 Perceptions of societal actors

In this part, we investigate the perceptions people hold of different societal actors in terms of responsibility for reducing climate change, likelihood of taking sufficient action to address climate change, and efficacy of that action in case they take it. As can be seen on the figure below, certain societal actors like foreign governments, companies, and industries are perceived as holding a higher responsibility for addressing climate change and a higher potential efficacy of their actions in terms of addressing climate change than other actors like the national government and citizens of one's own/other countries. Simultaneously, those actors that are seen as the most responsible are also seen as comparatively less likely to take sufficient climate action, with this discrepancy being particularly large for companies and industries. On the other hand, the national government, national citizens, and citizens abroad are perceived to take the amount of action more proportional to the responsibility ascribed to them.

Figure 3. Perceptions of a) the degree to which a given actor's climate action will contribute to mitigating climate change (left), b) the extent to which they are willing to take the necessary climate action (middle), and c) the extent to which they are responsible for mitigating climate change (right).



4.2 Climate action willingness and policy acceptability

The expectancy of a given actor taking sufficient climate action also spills over into support for policies targeting that actor, but in different ways depending on the actor in question. On the one hand, if people estimate industries to be less likely to take sufficient action, they are more supportive of policies incentivising that actor to take more climate action (e.g. establishment of an EU rail fund that invests into rail infrastructure and subsidies train tickets, $r = -.11$, $p < .05$), but there is no change in their support for policies imposing direct restrictions on that actor (e.g. ban on intensive cattle farming). On the other hand, conversely, if people estimate other citizens of

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their country to be more likely to take sufficient action, they will be more supportive of policies imposing restrictions on them (e.g. mandatory insulation of residential buildings, $r = 0.19$, $p < .001$). This seems to suggest individuals believe industries need to be pulled using incentives in order to engage in sufficient climate action, while other citizens need to be rather willing to engage in climate action for policies targeting them to be feasible and/or effective.

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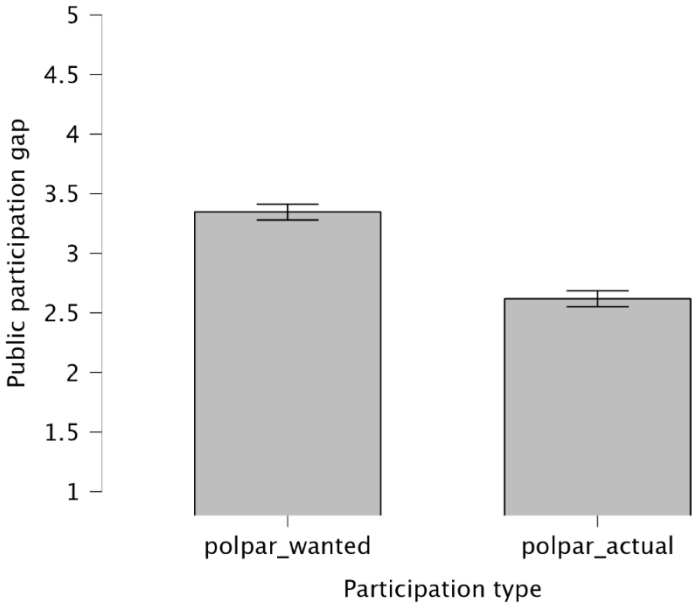
5 Political participation and climate policy acceptability

5.1 Public participation deficit

In this final section, we explore to what extent people feel they are involved in climate policy-making in their country and to what extent they desire to be involved. As is displayed on the figure below, we observe evidence of a public participation deficit: i.e. people desire to be involved in climate policy decision-making more than they perceive they are involved in the current political system in their country ($Z=12.97$, $p < .001$).

Figure 4. Public participation deficit: i.e. discrepancy between the desired degree of political participation and perceived actual degree of political participation.



5.2 Public participation and trust in the government

The low levels of perceived involvement in climate decision-making under the current system and the associated public participation deficit carry a range of detrimental downstream consequences. First, they impede trust in the government: the more people feel involved in the climate policy decision-making processes in their country, the more they trust the government ($\rho = 0.54$, $p < .001$), the more the believe the government possesses the necessary competencies for developing effective climate policy (competence-based trust, $\rho = 0.55$, $p < .001$), and the more they believe the government will take public interests into account when developing climate policies (integrity-based trust, $\rho = 0.58$, $p < .001$). Similarly, the lower the public participation deficit, the more people trust the government generally ($\rho = -0.34$, $p < .001$), in terms of their competence ($\rho = -0.31$, $p < .001$), and in terms of their integrity ($\rho = -0.38$, $p < .001$). The relationship between public participation deficit and integrity-based trust is also relatively stronger than that between the public participation deficit and competence-based trust ($z(697) = 2.4$, $p < .01$), indicating that closing the public participation gap might be especially effective for building integrity-based trust.

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5.3 Public participation and policy support

Second, as displayed in the first table below, people feeling more involved in climate policy decision-making within their country correlates with a higher support for a range of potential country-level climate policies. Interestingly though, a lower public participation deficit only correlates with a higher support for climate policies which impose direct costs for individual citizens (i.e. tax on beef, removal of subsidies for cattle farming, and a tax on non-renewable energy sources). This seems to suggest that people primarily desire relatively more participation when it comes to policies that directly affect them personally in a rather direct manner.

	Correlations between perceived political participation and policy support		
	Spearman's rho	df	p
CNTY_Policy_beefsubsidy	.269	691	< .001
CNTY_Policy_beeftax	.405	691	< .001
CNTY_Policy_insulation	.110	690	.002
CNTY_Policy_applsubsidy	.104	690	.003
CNTY_Policy_airvat	.072	689	.029
CNTY_Policy_taxfffirms	.027	680	.238
CNTY_Policy_flighttax	.115	691	.001
CNTY_Policy_energytax	.297	688	< .001
CNTY_all (all variables)	.247	664	< .001

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	Correlation between public participation deficit and policy support		
	Spearman's rho	df	p
CNTY_Policy_beefsubsidy	-.113	691	.001
CNTY_Policy_beeftax	-.213	691	< .001
CNTY_Policy_insulation	.038	690	.840
CNTY_Policy_applsubsidy	.086	690	.988
CNTY_Policy_airvat	.076	689	.977
CNTY_Policy_taxfffirms	.081	680	.983
CNTY_Policy_flighttax	.009	691	.596
CNTY_Policy_energytax	-.112	688	.002
CNTY_all	-.043	664	.134

5.4 Public participation and expected policy impacts

Third, not only do higher levels of perceived public participation relate to a higher support for climate policy, but also change the expectancy people have for the impacts of a given policy. The more people feel involved in national climate policymaking, the better they expect that policy to affect their quality of life (see Impact_'policy name'1 in the first table below) and their household's financial situation (see Impact_'policy name'2 in the first table below). We again observe the same effects for expected impacts of most measured policies when examining their relationship with a lower public participation deficit (see the second table below). These findings further display the importance of increasing people's involvement in climate policy and decreasing the political participation deficit in generating social feasibility for the policies in question.

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	Correlation between perceived political participation and expected policy impact		
	Spearman's rho	df	p
Impact_beefsubsidy1	.404	220	< .001
Impact_beefsubsidy2	.532	194	< .001
Impact_insulation1	.259	193	< .001
Impact_beeftax1	.404	220	< .001
Impact_beeftax2	.453	221	< .001
Impact_applsubsidy1	.273	198	< .001
Impact_applsubsidy2	.368	198	< .001
	r (Pearson)	df	p
Impact_insulation2	.316	194	< .001

	Correlation between public participation deficit and expected policy impact		
	Spearman's rho	df	p
Impact_beefsubsidy1	- .195	192	.003
Impact_beefsubsidy 2	-.377	194	< .001

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Impact_insulation1	-.017	193	.408
Impact_insulation2	-.172	194	.008
Impact_beeftax1	-.280	220	< .001
Impact_beeftax2	-.314	221	< .001
Impact_applsubsidy1	.010	198	.558
Impact_applsubsidy2	-.170	198	.008

6 Conclusions

In sum, we observe that people tend to underestimate the degree to which other citizens care about environmental protection, but that does not seem to significantly spill over into their policy support. Rather, policy support seems to be driven by the extent to which they expect different societal actors to take climate action and by the degree to which they feel involved in climate policy-making within the country. Based on these insights, we recommend that policy-makers who wish to increase social feasibility of their policies find ways of involving citizens in climate policy-making more and make sure the policies target societal actors in ways that align with how people perceive their willingness to engage in climate action.

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